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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**The Southern Campaign of the American Revolution: A Comparative Analysis  
of British and American Approaches**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** The Southern Campaign of the American Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of British and American Approaches

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**Thesis:** The British Southern Campaign failed because the British overestimated the availability of loyalist support, showed a lack of restraint in dealing with the population at large, and overextended themselves logistically. The Americans, however, were successful due to General Nathanael Greene's superior leadership, mission planning abilities, and highly accurate overall strategic vision of the campaign.

**Discussion:** In 1779 the British realized that the revolution in the American colonies was stalemated. After their shocking defeat at Saratoga, the British needed to regain momentum. Based on the assumption that there was greater loyalist support in the Carolinas, General Sir Henry Clinton launched the British Southern Campaign. After Clinton enjoyed a decisive victory with the seizure of Charleston in May 1780, Cornwallis assumed command of the Southern Department. Like Clinton, Cornwallis saw early success—a decisive victory at Camden-- and assumed their new strategy was working. However, after Camden and the relief of General Horatio Gates, a new American commander, Nathanael Greene, took charge of the American forces in the South. Through his superior mission analysis and planning abilities, Greene was able to turn the tide in the South. Greene recognized the realities of the operational environment and effectively integrated conventional and partisan forces, thereby leading an effective hybrid form of warfare.

**Conclusion:** The failure of the British Southern Campaign was an example of mission planning based on faulty assumptions. When the initial assumptions failed, the operation encountered challenges which led to more failures in the decision making process. The failed campaign eventually led to Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown and was a catalyst for the British to concede defeat. By analyzing the British Southern Campaign, we can learn valuable lessons for planning and executing a counter insurgency campaign. On the other hand, by examining the operation designed and executed by Greene, we can learn the value of detailed logistical planning and the integration of all viable tactics and forces in an operation.

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## *Preface*

The following thesis was inspired by a desire to learn more about what I now consider my home state. After nearly eighteen years of active service, I never lived in one location longer than four years. However, I have been blessed with the opportunity to maintain a household in the low country of South Carolina for seven years. I was always interested in the history of the birth of our country; however, I never had the opportunity to devote a lot of time to study it in detail. During the first two weeks of Command and Staff College, I received the lecture on the British Southern Campaign from Dr. John Gordon. I was shocked to learn the importance of my adopted state in the history of our nation and my ignorance on the subject. The rest they say is history. The seed was planted and my MMS topic revealed itself. This thesis is the culmination of my studies about the Southern Campaign of the British and Americans; however, it is just the beginning of my studies on the American Revolution in general.

Special thanks are in order for Dr. Gordon for his knowledge and guidance during this period of my professional development. A true southern gentleman, Dr. Gordon represents the Marine Corps and the state of South Carolina very well.

*“We fight, get beat, rise and fight again”*

*Nathanael Greene in a letter to French envoy, Chevalier de La Luzerne<sup>1</sup>*

### ***Introduction***

In 1780, the American Revolution was entering its fifth year. The conflict in the Northern colonies was in a virtual stalemate and popular support for the war, both in Great Britain and the colonies, was wavering. The American economy was in near collapse and, on the other side, the cost of the war in Britain was becoming less and less palatable for the British taxpayers. France's entry into the war in 1778, as well as Spain's declaration of war in 1779, led to a greater sense of urgency in Britain to end the conflict. The British realized they needed a shift in strategy to achieve a decisive victory or force the Americans to the bargaining table. They decided to shift their focus south and enlist Loyalists to aid in their efforts. The British campaign, characterized by a series of tactical victories, seemed to work at first. The British were able to deal the Americans a series of decisive losses at Charleston and Camden, in May and August respectively; however, the strategic victory they sought never materialized. In fact, the campaign eventually led to their defeat. This paper will explore the reasons why the British failed in their Southern Campaign by analyzing and comparing the campaigns executed by Lieutenant General Charles Earl Cornwallis, commander in chief of the British Southern Department, and General Nathanael Greene, commander in chief of the Southern Department of the Continental Army. In the end, the British failed to achieve victory in the South because they overestimated the availability of loyalist support, showed a lack of restraint in dealing with population at large, and overextended themselves logistically. The Americans, however, were successful due to General Nathanael Greene's superior leadership, mission planning abilities, and overall strategic vision of the campaign.

Under the direction of Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for the Colonies and in effect the director of the war against the Americans, and General Sir Henry Clinton, British Commander in Chief for North America, the Southern Strategy was designed. The British believed it was possible to maintain the stalemate in the North and divert resources and troops to the Southern colonies. They assumed there was greater loyalist support in the South which would allow them to pacify the region and then turn over security responsibility, or “Americanize” the conflict, to the loyalists. By implementing this strategy, the British believed they could gain a victory in one of two ways. The most desirable outcome would be to secure the Southern colonies and place loyalists in control. They would then redeploy their forces to the North. This would choke New England off from the resource rich South and allow them to refocus their efforts to defeat General George Washington’s army in the North. Their secondary outcome would be to again secure the Southern colonies, separate the South from the North, and gain an economic victory. There were those in the British government who believed New England could be separated from the South with relatively little impact to the Empire because Britain’s economic interests were mostly contained in the Southern colonies.

### ***Background***

In 1778, the Americans and British were in their third year of armed conflict. The year prior, General Horatio Gates dealt the British a stunning defeat at Saratoga, leading to an eventual stalemate in the North. Also as a result of Saratoga, the Americans gained enough international credibility to convince the French to enter into negotiations with the Americans. These talks resulted in a Franco-American alliance and the French entry into the war. The



British, recognizing the shift in the strategic setting, formulated a plan to shift the focus of the war from the North to the South. The British reasoned that if the Northern colonies could be isolated, efforts could be focused on the South, where Britain's economic interests were stronger. Also, regaining control of the South would strengthen Britain's ability to hold Florida against the Spanish. So in March, 1778, Lord George Germain, British Secretary of State for the Colonies, proposed a Southern campaign to General Sir Henry Clinton, British Commander in Chief of North America. Clinton initiated operations in the South by embarking 3,500 troops, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell, for the Georgia coast where they would join with 2,000 troops under the command of General Augustine Prevost. Operations against Savannah commenced on December 23 and were quickly concluded with a British victory. By the end of January 1779, Augusta also fell, leading to Campbell's claim that he took the "first stripe and star from the rebel flag of Congress"<sup>2</sup>. Campbell's victory however, was short lived. Underestimating the militia in the interior of the colony, Campbell was forced to abandon Augusta, leaving the loyalists to fend for themselves against the patriot militia.

With the departure of Campbell from Augusta, Prevost now turned his attention north to Charleston. He marched his troops across the Savannah River, driving north across the South Carolina coast and low country. Prevost arrived at Charleston on the morning of 11 May, but by 13 May, the defenders of Charleston were able to repulse his attack. Prevost was then met by Major General Benjamin Lincoln, American Southern Department Commander, at Stono Ferry. After conducting a reconnaissance, Lincoln determined Prevost's force was too strong and retired to Charleston. Prevost also retired and turned south, returning to Savannah. Prevost shored up his defenses during the summer of 1779 and narrowly repulsed a Franco-American attack against Savannah during September 1779.<sup>3</sup>

In December, 1779, Clinton embarked a total of 8,700 troops from New York aboard Admiral Mariot Arbuthnot's vessels.<sup>4</sup> His task was to take Charleston, South Carolina. His force arrived in Savannah during the beginning of February, 1780, and on 10 February, they began their movement north. Clinton, remembering the disastrous first attempt at taking Charleston, was methodical and patient for this attempt. His movements were precise and well-coordinated with Arbuthnot's fleet and he did not seek decisive engagements until all his siege preparations were in place. By 10 April, Clinton and Arbuthnot had Charleston cut off on three sides with the first parallel siege trench completed. A summons to surrender was sent to Lincoln. Lincoln refused the ultimatum and a second parallel was started. By 19 April, Clinton's forces were within 250 yards of the American lines and by 26 April, the first line of inner defense works was seized. The fighting between the American and British forces was ferocious and lasted until 12 May. Lincoln was forced to surrender Charleston. At 1100 on that day, Lincoln marched his troops out from their lines with their colors cased. It was the largest American loss of the war. The economic hub of the South was lost along with an estimated 5,500 troops captured.<sup>5</sup>

Once Charleston was secured, South Carolina appeared to be a conquered state. The Continental troops defending Charleston were now prisoners of war and the militia present were paroled. The Continental government was in exile and was in no way effective in its current state. The state under British control began to take on a sense of normality. Trade routes began to flow between the back country and the coast again and British currency bolstered the economy.<sup>6</sup>

The British plan to capture South Carolina and turn control over to the loyalists seemed to be working. The British reestablished royal control of the government in Charleston and

loyalists were quickly enlisted into a loyalist militia under the command of Major Patrick Ferguson. With the situation seemingly in control, Lord Clinton turned over command of the Southern Department to Lord Cornwallis. Clinton departed for New York on 5 June with approximately a third of his troops he originally brought south. This left Cornwallis with about 8,300 men to continue operations in the South.<sup>7</sup> However, after an initial series of successes, things would quickly sour. A series of miscalculations, lack of restraint, and poor decisions would turn their strategy on end.

### ***The British Campaign***

*"Since war is a conflict between opposing wills, we cannot make decisions in a vacuum. We must make our decisions in light of the enemy's anticipated reactions and counteractions, recognizing that while we are trying to impose our will on the enemy, he is trying to do the same to us"*

*MCDP 1*<sup>8</sup>

In order to analyze the British Southern campaign, it is of value to review the strategic and operational assumptions and goals of the British. The first, and arguably the most important assumption made, was that Georgia and the Carolinas were abundant with Loyalist support. This assumption was supported by James Simpson, the former royal Attorney General, who was directed by Clinton, and earlier by the ministry in London, to conduct a study throughout the South Carolina backcountry to determine the level of loyalist support. In a report delivered on 15 May, he determined that there were "great numbers, who continue attached to His Majesty's Government, and who will Join to effect the Reestablishment of it" if the British government provided for their safety.<sup>9</sup> Simpson went on to say that there were four distinct groups that populated the back country. The first group was the wealthy that would be happy to reestablish royal rule over the colonies. The second group felt no loyalty to either side, but was no longer

supportive of the rebel cause. This group was now willing to support the king. The third group was the rebels that, with the fall of Charleston, believed the war was lost. The final group was the committed rebel who would continue to fight.<sup>10</sup> It was also assumed that these Loyalists were ready and willing to support royal authority as soon as it reestablished itself. The assumption of the level of loyalist support led the British to employ their “Americanization” strategy where British regulars would secure territory, then turn over security responsibilities to loyalists thereby freeing British troops to pacify other areas. This economy of force strategy would allow a relatively small British force to pacify a larger area throughout the South.

The second assumption made by the British was that if the Northern colonies could be isolated from the Southern colonies, the North would become economically isolated and unable, or unwilling, to continue hostilities, thereby breaking the stalemate in the North. The British believed that by controlling the colonies from Georgia north to the Chesapeake, if the war was to be concluded via negotiations, the British would be in a much stronger position to negotiate.<sup>11</sup> They further believed that should the North still desire to continue hostilities with the South under British control, Britain’s economic interests were mostly contained within the South and losing the Northern colonies would be inconsequential.<sup>12</sup>

The other issue worthy of discussion is the subject of pardons. After Charleston fell, Clinton issued a series of three proclamations. The first of these proclamations was dated 22 May. In it, Clinton stipulated that all “faithful and peaceable Subjects” would be protected by royal authority and that anyone harassing those Loyalists would be dealt with severely, to include the confiscation of their property. The next proclamation on 31 May promised a full restoration of rights and privileges under British authority to those who declared their allegiance to the crown. It also granted an exemption to royal taxes to those who took the oath.<sup>13</sup> The last

proclamation, and arguably the most damaging to the British, was dated 3 June. This proclamation required all colonists, to include those who previously had accepted parole and were considered to be neutral, to declare their allegiances. Those that did not align with the crown would be deemed to be with the rebellion and enemies of the crown. Clinton reasoned, incorrectly, that by “obliging every man to declare and evince his principles I gave the loyalists an opportunity of detecting and chasing from among them such dangerous neighbors.” Clinton went on to say that under the previous proclamation a “great number of inveterate rebels might remain in the country and by their underhanded and secret counsel and other mechinations prevent the return of many well disposed persons to their allegiance.”<sup>14</sup> In actuality Clinton guaranteed the continuation of the rebellion in the colony by not allowing a colonist to remain on parole and remain neutral. The colonists were faced with a “with us or against us option”. Or, more precisely, there was no longer the option to remain neutral. The colonists were forced to choose sides. Some Whigs, that is Americans siding with the rebellion, in South Carolina who originally accepted parole and chose to live peacefully at home, no longer felt any obligation to remain neutral as they believed the conditions of their parole were violated. They rejoined the rebellion. However, there were those that owned land that feared losing their property. These colonists accepted the proclamation and took the oath of allegiance.<sup>15</sup>

After the fall of Charleston, Clinton sent troops throughout the South Carolina and Georgia hinterlands to establish a series of forts and posts. These included Augusta, Ninety Six, George Town, Cheraw, Camden, Hanging Rock, and Rocky Mount. The purposes of these posts were twofold. First, they would serve as a refuge for loyalists.<sup>16</sup> There was known violence occurring between Tories and Whigs in the backcountry and Clinton recognized the loyalists must be protected.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, they would serve as forward operating bases to lend logistical

support for operations conducted away from the sea lines of communication.<sup>18</sup> The geographical laydown of these posts spanned an arc of over 350 miles radiating from Charleston, and covered an area of over 15,000 square miles.<sup>19</sup>

When Clinton departed Charleston for New York on 08 June, the British troops in the South numbered approximately 8,300. Clinton returned to New York with some 3,000 troops, including most of the cavalry. He reported to Lord Germain that “there are few men in South Carolina who are not either our prisoners or in arms with us.”<sup>20</sup> Clinton left Cornwallis in charge of the Southern Department with instructions to use “the utmost plentitude of power, civil and military” and to maintain “the safety of Charleston and tranquility of South Carolina as the principle and indispensable objects of his attention”. He went on to say that “I left His Lordship at liberty, if he judged proper, to make a solid move into North Carolina, upon condition it could at the time be made without risking the safety of the posts committed to his charge.”<sup>21</sup>

### *Tactical Victories, Strategic Losses*

After the fall of Charleston, the greatest victory for the British in the colonies, a series of battles was fought that amounted to tactical victories for the British, but which ultimately contributed to their eventual loss. The first of these battles occurred at Waxhaw’s Creek on 29 May, 1780. Here, the remainder of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Virginia Continentals, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Abraham Buford, was making their way towards North Carolina. This force was originally dispatched to aid Lincoln in the defense of Charleston. However, they turned back when they were within 30 miles of Charleston after receiving word of Lincoln’s surrender.

These continentals, numbering 350-400 men, were all that was left of Continental forces in South Carolina.<sup>22</sup>

Buford and his men were on their way to Salisbury, North Carolina, when British cavalry, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, found them. The battle that followed was a clear tactical victory for the British. Tarleton and his forces suffered only five killed and 14 wounded while Buford's forces losses numbered 113 killed, 150 wounded and 53 prisoners. However, the stories that surfaced from the battle are what made it really significant in the broader context of the war. The ferocity of the fighting, and the alleged atrocities committed by Tarleton's forces, made the battle especially noteworthy. Stories of patriots cut down while asking for "quarter" (that is, to surrender), as well as British tossing aside dead Americans in order to stab and bludgeon the wounded underneath, quickly spread throughout the colony.<sup>23</sup>

Buford's defeat at the hands of Tarleton, in theory, should have meant the end of resistance in South Carolina. There were effectively no remaining organized rebel forces remaining in the colony. However, the effect of Buford's defeat was quite the opposite. When stories of "Bloody Tarleton" and "Buford's Massacre" made their way around the colony, public opinion of the British was galvanized. After the battle at Waxhaw's Creek, very few colonists could remain neutral or loyal to the crown and a desire for vengeance against the British spread throughout the colony.<sup>24</sup>

After the defeat of Lincoln at Charleston, The Continental Army required a new leader in the South. Washington lobbied for Nathanael Greene to assume command, however, Congress decided to give the command to the hero of Saratoga, General Horatio Lloyd Gates. At first, the

choice of Gates seemed to be a logical decision. He displayed a talent for building, administering and organizing armies, and was popular with the troops. Also, his experience at Saratoga, where supplies and resources were limited, was very similar to the situation in the South. His strategy in the North against General John Burgoyne was that of patience and waiting, forcing the British to make decisions and mistakes that would lead to their defeat. The only vocal opposition to the appointment of Gates was Washington. The basis for his opposition would soon be proven correct.<sup>25</sup>

When Charleston was under threat from Clinton's forces, Washington dispatched a force in mid-April of approximately 1,400 men under the command of Major General Baron Jean de Kalb. De Kalb and his forces were only able to make North Carolina when news of Lincoln's defeat reached him. On July 25, Gates linked up with de Kalb just south of Hillsboro, North Carolina. From the moment he took command, Gates displayed an uncharacteristic rashness and lack of patience that would spell disaster for the continentals. De Kalb's original plan called for his troops to march through the resource rich and pro-Whig Mecklenburg and Rowan counties of North Carolina. His plan then called for harassing attacks against the British leading to an assault on the British supply depot at Camden, South Carolina.<sup>26</sup>

Once Gates took command, he amazingly disregarded all advice given to him by de Kalb. Instead of being patient and taking the route that would lead them through the friendly and resource rich territory, he decided on a direct route to Camden. Although 50 miles shorter, this route led them through Tory populated country, barren of resources. The terrain was also much harder to traverse as the route selected by Gates was full of pine thickets, swamps, and rivers prone to flooding.<sup>27</sup> Never the less, he ordered an immediate march and on July 25 they departed. Once on the march, Gates' men were forced to live off of green apples, peaches, and



unripened-corn causing gastrointestinal issues throughout the ranks. They were however, able to enlist more fighting men along the way with the addition of General Richard Caswell's North Carolina militia as well as General Edward Stevens' Virginia militia. Gates and his army could only make ten to fifteen miles per day in the Southern heat and humidity. By 15 August, Gates and his force of approximately 3000 men reached the Camden area.<sup>28</sup>

On 09 August, Cornwallis received two letters from Lord Rawdon, the garrison commander at Camden. In these dispatches, Rawdon warned Cornwallis of an approaching rebel force, estimated to be approximately 5,000 troops under the command of Gates. Cornwallis recognized that Rawdon's force of approximately 1,000 men could not hold off Gates and quickly assembled reinforcements from Charleston. Cornwallis departed Charleston on 13 August with approximately 2,000 troops and covered the 110 miles between Charleston and Camden in four days, arriving on 13 August.<sup>29</sup> Cornwallis was now faced with a choice. Revised estimates of the rebels now placed their numbers at 6,000. British numbers were now closer to 2,200, having lost approximately 800 men to sickness. Cornwallis believed he was outnumbered, but he also believed that he had "little to lose by defeat, and much to gain by victory."<sup>30</sup>

By the night of 15 August, Cornwallis received enough information to advance. A loyalist spy was able to report a more accurate estimate of Gates' numbers as well as reporting that the majority of Gates' force was made up of militia. At the same time Cornwallis was preparing to move his force, Gates was issuing his orders to do the same. After his order was issued, Gates conferred with his adjutant general, Colonel Williams, estimating his force to number approximately 7,000 men. Williams, knowing this number to be in error, received the personnel reports from the general officers in the command. His count, reported to Gates,

numbered 3,052 men fit for duty. In a stunning moment of hubris, Gates proclaimed, “There are enough for our purpose.”<sup>31</sup>

In the dark morning hours of 16 August, the armies were assembled against each other, five miles north of Camden. Gates’ troops were in a poor physical state, plagued by a poor diet, intestinal distress, and exhaustion from their march southward. In another display of ineptitude, Gates placed his most inexperienced militia, instead of de Kalb’s experienced Continentals, directly opposite British regulars on the American left, expecting them to hold the line.<sup>32</sup> The Maryland and Delaware Continentals under de Kalb fought valiantly on the right, but the Virginia and North Carolina militia on the American left collapsed. Within an hour, the battle was over. The American forces fled north, with Gates abandoning his troops in his haste to escape. By nightfall, Gates made Charlotte, North Carolina, a distance of over 60 miles. Tarleton later boasted that “rout and slaughter ensued in every quarter.”<sup>33</sup>

Within hours of the battle at Camden, Cornwallis received word of the location of Thomas Sumter and his band of approximately 700 partisans. Sumter, also known as the Carolina Gamecock, was leading this force located approximately thirty miles west of Camden at Fishing Creek. Cornwallis quickly dispatched Tarleton and with a force of 350 dragoons and infantry. Sumter and his force were caught by surprise on 18 August, and were routed by Tarleton. Sumter’s force lost 150 killed or wounded and 350 captured. Sumter himself narrowly evaded capture.<sup>34</sup>

The battle at Camden and Fishing Creek was the third major defeat for the Americans in a little over three months and was later described as “the most disastrous defeat ever inflicted on an American army”.<sup>35</sup> While numbers of American casualties differ from various sources,

Cornwallis reported 800 to 900 Americans killed or wounded and approximately 1,000 prisoners taken.<sup>36</sup> On the British side, 331 were either killed, wounded or missing.<sup>37</sup> A numerically superior, but inexperienced and poorly led American force was defeated by a numerically inferior but well led British force. The stunning series of defeats suffered by the Americans at Savannah, Charleston, the Waxhaws, Camden, and Fishing Creek left the patriot cause in a state of disarray. However, Camden would be the turning point in the war. Gates was relieved of command and Washington was given his choice of Greene to lead the Southern Campaign.

### *An 18<sup>th</sup> Century Insurgency in the Backcountry*

*“...an accurate appreciation of what insurgent casualty numbers might indicate regarding enemy strength or capability requires knowing the exact number of insurgent armed fighters initially present. In addition, this indicator does not measure several important factors: for example, which side the local populace blames for collateral damage, whether this fighting and resultant casualties damaged the insurgent infrastructure and affected the insurgency strategy in that area and where families of dead insurgents reside and how they might react.”*  
*FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency*<sup>38</sup>

After the fall of Charleston, the British set out on their attempt to pacify the back country. The plan to enlist loyalist support by raising militia units was beginning to be executed. The plan called for all young and unmarried males in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina to be organized into companies, led by loyalist lieutenants, with one British officer to be in overall charge of the company. However, the British quickly learned that military service was less than appealing for the colonists. The colonists were reluctant to accept the terms of enlistment: six months of every year. In addition to the disagreeable terms of enlistment, the potential recruits were even more apprehensive to leave their families and farms to the mercy of the wild back country.<sup>39</sup> The area in and around Ninety-Six was the only area in which they were able to find

sufficient levels of Loyalist support. Not only were loyalist militias becoming difficult to recruit, those loyalist militias that were formed were often poorly disciplined and lacked restraint in carrying out their missions. The loyalist militias were often more interested in looting and carrying out revenge attacks against their Whig rivals than in securing the peace. These Acts of violence were common even though, by Cornwallis's orders, such acts were to be "severely punished."<sup>40</sup>

One such event, which preceded the victory at Camden, had lasting repercussions; it would motivate a fighter who became an iconic leader of the revolution. As Tarleton was pursuing Buford, he and his legion came across the plantation of Thomas Sumter. Sumter, a former Lieutenant Colonel in the Continental Army, resigned his commission in September 1789. He wanted to remain neutral for the remainder the war, wanting to live in peace on his plantation above the Santee River. Sumter was warned of the approach of Tarleton's dragoons, and their intention to take him prisoner. He fled north to Salisbury, North Carolina, where he knew there were friendly troops. When Tarleton's troops arrived at Sumter's plantation, Sumter's wife refused to tell the British where her husband was. As punishment, Tarleton's troops looted, and then burned Sumter's plantation.<sup>41</sup>

After his plantation was burned, Sumter was enraged and motivated to fight. Once in North Carolina, he recruited, trained, and organized bands of militia with similar stories of maltreatment under British and Tory hands. Once these partisans were organized, they were sent back into South Carolina to conduct their attacks. Sumter focused his area of operations in the area in and around the center of South Carolina. They did not seek decisive engagements, rather they conducted hit and run attacks against British outposts and supply lines. On the day of Gates' defeat at Camden, Sumter and his men destroyed a British supply convoy on its way to

Camden capturing 100 British regulars, fifty Loyalist militia, and 42 supply wagons.<sup>42</sup> Sumter was involved in numerous engagements against the British, however, he was never known as a skillful tactician. His talent was his ability to keep his militias motivated and willing to keep up the fight. These incessant attacks would infuriate the British but they would never be able to stop the “Gamecock”.<sup>43</sup>

Two other partisan leaders played important roles in the struggle against the British: Francis Marion and Andrew Pickens. Marion, also known as the Swamp Fox, was the only South Carolina native among the three. Marion was a very experienced soldier serving since the two Cherokee Wars of 1759 and 1761 as a junior officer. He was serving with Lincoln’s army in Charleston as Clinton approached. An ankle injury, rendering him unable to fight, forced his evacuation from the city just before its fall. He barely escaped capture. After the fall of Charleston, Marion made his way towards North Carolina where was introduced to de Kalb and Gates. De Kalb recognized Marion’s experience, but Gates was dismissive of Marion. Instead of incorporating Marion and his twenty men into his forces, Gates sent Marion on an intelligence gathering mission. In fact, a colonel serving under Gates was quoted as saying that “the general himself was glad of an opportunity of detaching Colonel Marion...” because of his, and his men’s, “burlesque” personal appearance.<sup>44</sup> This is just another example of the ineptitude of Gates as Marion and his men were the only other available cavalry besides Charles Armand’s Legion of sixty men. Once Marion recovered from his broken ankle, he resumed operations in South Carolina.

Marion began by collecting intelligence on British and loyalist forces in and around the Santee. He reached Lynch’s Creek on 10 August, where he assumed command of a rebel unit, and the region from Camden to the coast. He was conducting harassing attacks against British

supply lines approaching Camden when he received word of Gates' defeat at Camden and Sumter's defeat at Fishing Bridge. Marion then began two months of attacks against the British and Loyalists. These attacks were of such concern to Cornwallis, that by October he detached Tarleton and most of his legion to find and destroy Marion and his men. Tarleton pursued Marion through the swamps, but was frustrated in his efforts. After a twenty six mile pursuit, Tarleton was quoted as saying, "But as for this damned old fox, the devil himself could not catch him".<sup>45</sup> While Tarleton was pursuing Marion, Sumter was free to recover from Fishing Creek and conduct his own operations. His operations were so successful, Cornwallis recalled Tarleton to deal with Sumter. Marion was free again to attack British lines.

Andrew Pickens, like Sumter and Marion, first learned to fight during the Cherokee Wars. When the revolution broke out, Pickens served at Ninety-Six and participated in the actions against Prevost at Savannah. After the fall of Charleston, he was forced to surrender the fort at Ninety-Six, accepted British parole, and retired to his plantation. However, like Sumter, the British burned his plantation. He subsequently gave notice that he no longer considered his parole to be valid, and took up arms and continued fighting. His area of operations focused on the upcountry of the state. It is important to note that the three partisan leaders in the state, Sumter, Marion, and Pickens, did not split the state into their zones of operation for any grand strategic reason. Rather, they operated in the areas close to where they had homes and were familiar with the terrain.<sup>46</sup>

During the last four months of 1780, Marion, Sumter, and Pickens, were completely cut off from supplies and support, despite their successful harassment of the British, and were the only armed resistance remaining in South Carolina. The fall of 1780 was the low point of

American hopes in the South. It is a testament to these men's leadership that they were able to keep their men motivated and the spirit of revolution alive in South Carolina.

### *A String of Losses*

After his victory at Camden, and Sumter's defeat at Fishing Creek, Cornwallis had good reason to believe his strategy was working. It seemed organized resistance in South Carolina was crushed and Loyalists were joining with Colonel Turnbull's New York Volunteers, Major Patrick Ferguson's American Volunteers, and Tarleton's British Legion. Cornwallis used this opportunity to care for his sick in Camden and made preparations for a campaign in North Carolina. He also decided to use this time to crush any last elements of resistance in South Carolina. In another display of over zealousness and lack of restraint, Cornwallis sent out forces with instructions to "disarm in the most rigid manner the Country between the Santee and the Pedee...I have myself ordered several militia to be executed who had enrolled themselves and borne Arms with us, and afterwards revolted to the enemy".<sup>47</sup> The results, however, were not what he expected. The "justice" meted out by Cornwallis and his forces had quite the opposite effect. It drove Sumter back into the field and continued the resentment of the populace against the British. Cornwallis's answer to this was to increase the severity of his punishments.

As Cornwallis prepared for North Carolina, he sent Ferguson and his American Loyalists to the west to clear out any remaining resistance. He was to secure the frontier area, enlist more loyalist forces, then link up with Cornwallis in North Carolina. At first, Ferguson was successful in enlisting support. He recruited approximately 1,000 loyalists to join his militia. However,

just like Cornwallis and Tarleton, Ferguson made a blunder that would have serious repercussions.

Ferguson, now in Old Fort, North Carolina at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains, sent word to the settlements that Colonel Isaac Shelby, a North Carolina rebel, was to surrender to him. Shelby was a leader of a group called the Over Mountain Men that previously attacked Ferguson's force at Musgrove Hill on 18 August. In this action, the loyalists lost 63 killed, 90 wounded, and 70 captured.<sup>48</sup> This group of mostly Scot-Irish Presbyterians was fiercely independent, living in the fertile valleys of the Blue Ridge Mountains in what is now east Tennessee. They mostly favored the Patriot cause, but wanted above all else, to live in a state independent of British rule. When Ferguson sent the message that Shelby was to surrender or "he would come over the mountains and put him to death and burn his whole country", the Over Mountain Men were enraged.<sup>49</sup> Shelby, along with Colonel John Sevier, another leader in the area, sent out word to gather men and arms. In the end, they raised a force estimated to be as many as 1,800 men, consisting of Over Mountain Men as well as militia from the Carolinas and Virginia. Once organized, the force elected William Campbell commander of the force.<sup>50</sup>

On 27 September, Ferguson received word of Campbell's approaching force. He made the decision to retreat towards Charlotte, where Cornwallis was, sending a request for reinforcements. In Ferguson's request for forces, he stated, "Three or four hundred good soldiers, part dragoons, would finish this business. Something must be done soon. This is their last push in this quarter and they are extremely cowed".<sup>51</sup> Ferguson stopped his retreat on 06 October atop King's Mountain; a steep and wooded hilltop in the Blue Ridge foothills. He considered his location to be of superior for the defense and declared that "the Almighty could not drive him from it."<sup>52</sup>



The battle the following day, 07 October, was a wholesale slaughter of Ferguson and his men. The Over Mountain Men surrounded the hill on three sides and had superior cover and concealment for their advance up the hill. Ferguson's men, however, were in the open atop the hill and were easy targets for the rebel force, who were superior marksmen. The loyalists charged with bayonets but were beaten back each time with withering rifle fire. There was no mercy given to the loyalists. Tales of men cut down as they were waving the flag of surrender were common. The most accurate account of the events that day seems to be from Shelby. He is quoted as saying "Our men who had been scattered in the battle were continually coming up and continued to fire, without comprehending in the heat of the moment what had happened; and some who had heard that at Buford's defeat...were willing to follow that bad example".<sup>53</sup>

In the end, the battle lasted approximately one hour. Ferguson was killed along with 311 other loyalists killed or wounded. 660 loyalists were captured. This battle was one of the worst losses of American lives as Ferguson was the only Briton present. The entirety of his force was made of American Loyalists. The rebels lost 38 killed and 64 wounded. For the rebel militia, it was one of the finest hours of the revolution. The rebels were able to demonstrate their ability to quickly organize and deploy a force of sufficient numbers to defeat a threat. It also demonstrated the existence of talented leadership. Ferguson, on the other hand, failed to effectively analyze the strengths of his enemy and his apparent weaknesses. The manner in which he established his defense gave the advantage to the rebels using their rifles and superior marksmanship. Ferguson's use of bayonet charges to break up the advancing enemy was an unreasonable tactic given the situation. The effects of King's Mountain also had broader implications for the British. It was the first large scale decisive defeat since Saratoga and tipped the balance of power in the South to the rebel Whig side. Cornwallis, now under threat again in South Carolina, withdrew

from Charlotte back to Winnsboro, South Carolina. Clinton went so far as to say that King's Mountain was "the first link of a chain of evils that followed each other in succession until they at last ended in total loss of America."<sup>54</sup> Another far reaching result of the battle was on loyalist motivation to fight in the South. The defeat and carnage on the Loyalist side would not bode well for Cornwallis's recruiting efforts. Taken in conjunction with the successes of Sumter and Marion, Cornwallis was now in a deteriorating situation.<sup>55</sup>

### ***The Tide Turns***

*"We should try to understand the unique characteristics that make the enemy system function so that we can penetrate the system, tear it apart, and, if necessary, destroy the isolated components. We should seek to identify and attack critical vulnerabilities and those centers of gravity without which the enemy cannot function effectively. This means focusing outward on the particular characteristics of the enemy rather than inward on the mechanical execution of predetermined procedures." MCDP 1 Warfighting<sup>56</sup>*

On 05 October, two days before the battle at King's Mountain, the Continental Congress authorized Washington to name a successor to Gates to command the Southern Department. Washington originally wanted Nathanael Greene selected instead of Gates and his choice now was no different. Greene was well suited to take command. He participated in actions throughout the revolution learning valuable lessons throughout the war. He committed errors which would lead to the disaster at Fort Mifflin, however, he learned from his mistakes and never made the same mistake twice. Later, at Valley Forge, after Washington relieved Thomas Mifflin of his duties as Quarter Master General, Greene assumed that post. Here he learned the art of logistics planning and transportation that would pay dividends in the future. After his time as Quarter Master General, and a series of political squabbles with the Congress, Greene

assumed command of the post at West Point. On 14 October, 1780, Greene was named the Commander of the Southern Department. Immediately recognizing the logistical challenges he would face in the South, he went before Congress to secure as much support as they could furnish to support his upcoming campaign. The Congress, however, was unable to provide any support.<sup>57</sup>

Greene understood the challenges before him. He knew in order to defeat the British, a decisive battle would need to be fought and won; however, he also knew he didn't have the manpower or resources available for that decisive battle. Greene and Washington discussed the matter and agreed a campaign employing hit and run tactics, similar to those executed by the partisan leaders in the South, would be prudent. This strategy would force Cornwallis in to a constant state of defense, defending those posts he already maintained, and not allowing him to gain any more territory. Washington also assigned Baron von Steuben, the Prussian known for his ability to train troops, as well as Lieutenant Colonel "Light Horse Harry" Lee with his dragoons and mounted infantry, to his command.<sup>58</sup> Lee, with his cavalry, was especially pleasing to Greene as he determined cavalry would be especially important in the Southern terrain.<sup>59</sup>

As Greene made his way south, his lessons as Quarter Master General started to pay dividends. Before he departed, Washington warned him of the difficult terrain he was about to operate on. Washington made special mention of the numerous creeks and rivers that crossed the Southern colonies. Greene heeded these warnings and made concerted efforts to prepare for these eventual river crossings. While in Virginia, Greene met with Thomas Jefferson, the Virginia Governor. Although Greene was not impressed by Jefferson's military acumen or Jefferson's ability to provide supplies, they made an innovation that would have a weighty

impact on his campaign. They figured out a way to mount wheels under the hull of the light boats Greene needed to cross the rivers. This allowed rapid transport and deployment of these boats throughout the region. Greene also recruited more manpower, including men to reconnoiter the rivers and roads in the region. These reconnaissance missions were to determine distances between towns, the suitability of the roads, and whether or not the use of the flat bottomed boats was feasible. By the time he arrived in the area, it was said that Greene, who never saw the area before, knew it better than someone who was raised in the area. This detailed reconnaissance would pay huge dividends when he engaged Cornwallis.<sup>60</sup>

Greene continued south and arrived at Hillsborough, North Carolina on 27 November. He expected to find Gates and the remnants of his Army there. Gates, however, marched his troops to Salisbury, North Carolina, hoping to find rations there. Salisbury was not able to give Gates the supplies he needed, so he continued to Charlotte. Greene finally linked up with Gates and found a disheartening sight. The army, which numbered 2,300 of which 1,500 were fit for duty, was in a sad state. Greene was quoted in a letter as saying that the troops were “wretched beyond description”. He sent a report to Washington stating the men were “literally, naked; and a great part totally unfit for any kind of duty, and must remain so until clothing can be had from the northward”.<sup>61</sup>

More disturbing than the appearance of the men was their level of discipline. In a letter to Washington, Greene states, “General Gates had lost the confidence of the officers, and the loss of all their discipline, and they have been so addicted to plundering that they were a terror to the inhabitants.”<sup>62</sup> Greene knew that the populace must be supportive of the rebel cause to have any hope of defeating the British. Greene saw this as his most pressing concern and immediately set out to rectify the situation. He firmly believed that leadership from the officers would have a

profound impact on his campaign. In a demonstration of his resolve to foster discipline in the ranks, Greene hanged an insubordinate soldier publicly.<sup>63</sup>

There were positive assets that Greene inherited from Gates. The first was Brigadier General Daniel Morgan from Virginia. Morgan, also known as the “Old Waggoner”, was an experienced soldier who began his military service in 1755. In the revolution, he saw action in Quebec, Philadelphia, and played a major role in the battle of Saratoga. Morgan joined Gates immediately after the defeat at Camden and was given command of an elite corps of light infantry.<sup>64</sup>

Greene also recognized the value of the partisan leaders and their men operating independently in South Carolina. For example, on 4 December Greene wrote Marion asking him to continue his harassing attacks aimed at disrupting British supply lines between Camden and Charleston. He also asked Marion to provide intelligence on British movements. It is interesting to note that unlike Gates’ cool reception to Marion and his band of militia, Greene was very cordial to him and is quoted as saying “I have not the honor of your acquaintance, but I am no stranger to your character and merit”.<sup>65</sup>

Greene, also wanting to coordinate his efforts with Sumter, visited him at his home. Sumter, who was never known to willingly conduct joint operations, was recovering from wounds sustained in a recent battle with Tarleton at Blackstock. Sumter welcomed the new commander and offered the intelligence gathered during recent operations and his advice. Sumter warned Greene of reinforcements, numbering 1,500 under the command of Major General Alexander Leslie that were enroute to Cornwallis, who was now in Winnsboro. Sumter

urged him to act boldly and strike Cornwallis. Greene promised to give it his consideration and requested Sumter continue supplying him information on enemy locations and dispositions.<sup>66</sup>

After collecting as much information as he could, Greene set out to plan his mission. He knew there were now three forces operating against him. The first was Tarleton and his fast moving dragoons. The second was Cornwallis and his 3,300 men armed with artillery. Lastly, was the newly arrived Leslie, marching from Charleston towards the interior.<sup>67</sup> Greene knew Cornwallis would view his newly assembled army as the prime target and would make every effort to smash him as quickly as possible. Greene's ultimate objective was to build an army capable of matching Cornwallis; however, Greene did not have the supplies or manpower at that time. Greene's problem therefore was the following: He could not allow Cornwallis to mass his forces and crush his army in training, while at the same time Cornwallis must be under constant pressure from Sumter, Marion, and Pickens.<sup>68</sup>

Armed with this information, Greene assembled his commanders and issued his orders. Knowing he was outnumbered and violating conventional military thinking, Greene ordered his army to divide in three. Greene took charge of one group and marched them from Charlotte to Cheraw, South Carolina. The purpose of this move was to give him time to train and equip his army. The second group was assigned to Morgan.<sup>69</sup> The group assigned Morgan were considered the best soldiers on hand. Morgan's orders were to employ his forces against the British left flank and rear, west of the Catawba River. He was to exercise his own judgment on his actions but remain cautious and not to be taken by surprise.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Morgan was ordered to protect and raise the spirits of the population, collect supplies and cache the stores in his rear areas, and, above all else, collect intelligence on British movements.<sup>71</sup> The last force detached was that of Lee's dragoons. Greene ordered Lee to link up with Marion in order to

assist Sumter in harassing the British right flank.<sup>72</sup> In explaining his actions, Greene made the following statement,

It makes the most of my inferior force, for it compels my adversary to divide his, and holds in doubt as to his line of conduct. He cannot leave behind to come at me, or his posts at Ninety-Six and Augusta would be exposed. And he cannot chase Morgan far, or prosecute his views upon Virginia while I can have the whole country open before me. I am as near Charleston as he is, and as near Hillsborough as I was at Charlotte; so I am in no danger of being cut off from my reinforcements.<sup>73</sup>

Greene deployed his forces on 20 December and by 26 December they began having an effect. Cornwallis received reports of Morgan's troops threatening Ninety-Six with 3,000 men, causing him to send Tarleton to defend. Once Tarleton arrived at Ninety-Six, he reported Morgan was not in the area and not threatening the post. On 4 January, Tarleton proposed a move against Morgan and requested reinforcements. Cornwallis agreed and sent word that he would move on 7 January. He also sent orders to Leslie, ordering him to join the main army. Over the next ten days, heavy rains and flooding delayed Cornwallis's and Leslie's movements, preventing them from linking up with Tarleton. Tarleton's movement was also slow; however, by 17 January he found Morgan's force at Cowpens, South Carolina.<sup>74</sup>

There are conflicting opinions whether Morgan intended to continue evading Tarleton or if he was trading space for time, withdrawing long enough to arrive at a geographical location that would suit him in the defense. The facts, however, are not in question. On the morning of 16 January, Morgan was forced to break his camp in such a rush that Tarleton and his forces were able to eat meals left by Morgan, still cooking over the fires.<sup>75</sup> However, seven miles from where this occurred was Hannah's Cowpens. The Cowpens was a well-known meeting place throughout the area. Morgan inspected the field and decided to make his stand there. He sent

out word to Pickens and other militia in the area of the impending battle and made his preparations.<sup>76</sup>

Reveille sounded for Tarleton's troops at 0200 on 17 January and they were on the move by 0300. Tarleton, with approximately 1,100 troops made the five mile journey by 0645. By 0700 on the morning of 17 January, the field was set and the battle began. In an unorthodox move, Morgan placed his militia and 150 sharpshooters on the front line. He knew from reports of Tarleton's tactics the British would send their dragoons first to make a direct frontal assault. Morgan's orders were for the sharpshooters and militia to fire two or three well aimed shots at the British wearing epaulets; the officers and sergeants responsible for command and control. When the first line of Tarleton's dragoons advanced, as Morgan anticipated, fifteen of the fifty were killed by the sharpshooters. The next to advance was Tarleton's infantry. Pickens' South Carolina militia, just behind the original line of sharpshooters, opened fire just as the first line of militia did. They directed their fire at the officers and sergeants and, as instructed, after two or three well aimed shots, withdrew behind the next line of troops 150 yards to their rear. Of the casualties suffered by the British that day, the majority came from this exchange of fire; forty percent of them were officers.<sup>77</sup>

When Tarleton observed what he perceived to be a retreat, he ordered his 17<sup>th</sup> Dragoons to charge the American left. However, the Americans were well prepared. The American left flank, comprised of Virginia Continentals, held the line. Then, when the British assault appeared to falter, Washington's dragoons counter attacked. The British dragoons fled, leaving ten dead. Tarleton, seeing the situation deteriorating, personally led the next charge, but was also beaten back. It was at this point that most of Tarleton's force waved the white flag and asked for quarter.<sup>78</sup>



In the end, the battle lasted one hour. Tarleton lost one hundred dead, including thirty nine officers, as well as leaving 229 wounded and 600 prisoners. This equates to over eighty percent of Tarleton's force taken out of action. Tarleton also lost two artillery pieces, 800 muskets and 100 horses.<sup>79</sup> Tarleton himself was wounded but was able to flee the battlefield. The Americans lost twelve killed and sixty wounded. It is worth mentioning that of the British who asked for quarter, not a single man was harmed. It was a difficult task for the officers of Morgan's army as many of the troops called for "Tarleton's quarter". Morgan later wrote, "Not a man was killed, wounded, or even insulted, after the surrender. Had not the Britons during this contest received so many lessons in humanity, I should flatter myself that this might teach them a little, but I fear they are incorrigible."<sup>80</sup>

The battle fought at the Cowpens was a match between two fairly numerically equal forces. The Americans won the day because of superior leadership and Morgan's astute tactical employment of his troops. He recognized his apparent weaknesses, the militia, as well as Tarleton's habit of brash frontal assaults. He effectively negated a perceived weakness in his militia with their superior marksmanship abilities against Tarleton's weakness. In a little less than three months, the British and the loyalists lost two decisive battles. The aftermath of Cowpens had two major results. The first was the raised hopes and spirits of the Americans. The battle rallied American support and resulted in greater numbers of militia turning out to fight as well as an increase in materiel support from the North. The second result was the effect it had on the British. Although it was not the decisive battle that ended the war, it did lead Cornwallis to make decisions that would lead to his eventual defeat.<sup>81</sup> After the battle, Cornwallis said, "The late affair has almost broke my heart."<sup>82</sup>

Morgan did not have time to savor his victory. He knew Cornwallis was within a day's ride and could not hold the field against his superior numbers. Morgan, assuming the worst case scenario, thought Cornwallis would move immediately after he received the report of the loss at Cowpens. As such, Morgan and his troops were on the move by noon that day. Their destination was the fords crossing the Catawba River. In a fortunate turn of events for Morgan, Cornwallis did not move until 19 January. The reason for Cornwallis's delay was twofold. First, he waited until Tarleton and his men made it back to the camp. He did not fully believe the initial reports he received from the troops making their way back from the battle. He wanted to hear the report directly from Tarleton who took a day to make it back to the British camp. Second, Cornwallis wanted to link up with Leslie and his reinforcements before he moved. Leslie's troops arrived throughout the day on 18 January.<sup>83</sup> On 23 January, Morgan crossed the Catawba and camped at Sherrald's Ford.

Cornwallis began his movement on 19 January. He originally assumed Morgan would move towards King's Mountain but was incorrect. It was not until 22 January that he received accurate reports of Morgan's direction. Cornwallis then headed for Ramsour's Mills on the Catawba. His movement was slow and laborious as he was weighted down with a huge wagon train of baggage and supplies. On 25 January, Cornwallis arrived at Ramsour's Mill. The total distance Cornwallis covered since departing on 19 January was only 67 miles. If he continued at his present rate, he knew he could never catch Morgan. This led to a fateful decision for Cornwallis. In an attempt to lighten his load and increase his rate of march, he ordered the baggage and wagons destroyed; effectively turning his entire army into light infantry. The only stores retained were salt, ammunition, medical supplies, and whatever the men could carry in their rucksacks. The destruction of his supplies took two days to complete. Cornwallis began

his movement again on 28 January as a heavy downpour began. Devoid of any shelter, his men arrived at the Catawba River, but due to the rains, it was swollen and unfordable. Morgan and his men were at Sherrald's Ford at this time. There were only a few miles separating them from Cornwallis, but they were completely out of danger as long as Cornwallis could not cross the Catawba.<sup>84</sup>

Once the river receded on 31 January, the chase was on. Greene, who linked up with Morgan at Sherrald's Ford on 30 January, sent orders to his forces to begin preparations for a dash to the North. The logistical planning he did when he traveled south was now going to pay off. Stores were prepositioned at Guilford Court House and flat bottomed boats were stationed at anticipated river crossings. Over the next nine days, Cornwallis gave chase north through Salisbury, North Carolina then to Guilford Court House. Greene arrived there on 8 February and his army reunited for the first time in months. All told, Greene had over 2,000 soldiers assembled, of which 1,400 were Continentals. A council of war was assembled to discuss fighting Cornwallis there. Greene thought the terrain was favorable to him, but the officers were against the fight. They argued the army was in no condition to fight as they were poorly supplied, poorly clothed, poorly fed, and in an overall sad state after the grueling movement. Greene agreed and continued the evasion from Cornwallis, who was now twenty five miles southwest in Salem, North Carolina.<sup>85</sup>

On 10 February, Greene broke camp. He sent Colonel Otto Williams with Lee to the west, towards the British, to screen his movement. Greene's objective was to cross the Dan River at Irwin's Ferry. This was all previously planned and coordinated by Lieutenant Colonel Carrington and Colonel Kosciuszko. For some time prior, Carrington and Kosciuszko gathered

flat boats in preparation for Greene's eventual crossing. Sadly, it was on this day that Daniel Morgan took his leave. Citing health concerns, he returned home to Winchester, Virginia.<sup>86</sup>

Over the next four days, Williams was involved in a series of skirmishes with General Charles O'Hara and his advance guard of British. To aid in the screen, Williams led O'Hara towards Dix's Ferry which was six mile downstream of Irwin's Ferry. The chase was intense with O'Hara closing within four mile of Williams and his cavalry. However, on 14 February, Williams received a message from Greene stating "All our troops are over and the stage is clear...I am ready to receive you and give you a hearty welcome".<sup>87</sup> Williams and his cavalry now made for Irwin's Ferry as quick as he could. They arrived around 2000 and quickly made their way across on the boats. Less than an hour after they completed their crossing, O'Hara arrived with his troops. The Americans had won the race. Cornwallis, without boats and unable to cross the Dan by foot, was forced to withdraw to Hillsborough, North Carolina.<sup>88</sup>

While Greene was north of the Dan and out immediate danger, he took the opportunity to rest and refit his forces. He had no intentions of abandoning the South. He was also pleased to receive 600 reinforcements from the Virginia militia as well as another 400 Continentals. These reinforcements brought his total strength to approximately 2000, half of which were Continentals. The news he received while north of the Dan was not all good though. He learned of Cornwallis's arrival in Hillsborough and Cornwallis's call for loyalists in North Carolina to rally for their king. To initiate a counter to this, Greene dispatched Lee and his cavalry on 18 February to link up with Pickens, who was still south of the Dan harassing the British. The following day, Greene marched the rest of his army back into North Carolina.<sup>89</sup>

As Lee made his way towards Hillsborough, he and Pickens received intelligence reports of a large Tory militia being raised under the command of Dr. John Pyle. Pyle knew that Cornwallis had sent Tarleton and his dragoons out to escort them to camp. Lee also knew this. Using this information, Lee devised a plan to fool Pyle. Pyle was on the lookout for Tarleton and his troops dressed in their famous green jackets, but Lee and his troops also wore green uniforms. Lee found Pyle and his troops before Tarleton did. The unsuspecting Pyle welcomed Lee into his camp without confirming his identity and Lee launched his ambush. In what amounted to wholesale slaughter, Pyle's militia lost 100 killed and 200 wounded within a mile of Tarleton's camp. Lee did not lose a single man. The effects were almost immediate. Loyalists were now intimidated to the point of sheer terror. There would be no more loyalist volunteers arriving at Cornwallis's camp.<sup>90</sup>

Cornwallis's problems were mounting. Supplies available in Hillsborough were almost nonexistent as they were picked clean by the Americans when they made their way north. Cornwallis's decision to destroy his supply wagon was beginning to have an effect. His troops were under fed and poorly clothed in what is historically the second coldest month of the year in that region.<sup>91</sup> He was also too far from any British supply depot to hope for any resupply columns. In an attempt to find more forage, on 26 February Cornwallis marched his troops into the countryside near a crossroads that led to Guilford Court House and towards Wilmington, North Carolina. However, his troops were not as adept as the local militias at living off the land in harsh conditions. After weeks of inadequate nutrition and living unsheltered from the elements, Cornwallis was losing troops to sickness. His numbers were reduced to approximately 2,200 with no hope of reinforcement. Cornwallis had to decide whether to withdraw towards the

coast where supplies were available or stay and fight. He knew if he wanted a decisive battle against Greene, the time was now, before his situation got worse.<sup>92</sup>

Greene, meanwhile, was never far from Cornwallis. O'Hara reported that the two armies were never separated by more than twenty miles. In an effort to keep Cornwallis off balance, Greene and his army never stayed at the same camp for more than two nights and continued their harassing attacks against Cornwallis. The purpose of Greene's harassing attacks was to buy him more time. He knew reinforcements were inbound and on 10 March, they arrived. That day, 1,060 North Carolina militia arrived as well as another 1,000 from Virginia. On 11 March, another 550 Virginia Continentals arrived. This brought Greene's strength to over 4,000 men, 1,600 of which were Continentals. The time for decisive action finally arrived for Greene as he knew Cornwallis's numbers were somewhere around 2,200 and falling.<sup>93</sup>

Both Greene and Cornwallis knew a battle was impending. Between 11 March and 13 March, the two armies inched closer and closer to each other. On 14 March, the two armies converged around Guilford Court House. The Americans were positioned to the North and the British held the ground to the South. On 15 March, the two armies met. For Greene, this was the second time he saw this terrain as he had thoroughly surveyed the land when he was eluding Cornwallis during his race for the Dan.

The decision by Cornwallis to engage a force twice his size may be one of the bravest decisions of the Revolution. As the battle unfolded, it was clear the British fought bravely and in the end, they won the field. Greene ordered the retreat at 1530. However, the victory won by Cornwallis was a Pyrrhic one. Of the 2,200 British soldiers that took the field that day, 532 were killed or wounded. In one day, Cornwallis lost twenty five percent of his force. Greene, on the

other hand, left the field with his army intact. American losses numbered at seventy eight dead and 183 wounded.<sup>94</sup>

After the battle, Cornwallis began his movement towards Wilmington. His army shattered, he was in desperate need of supplies and troops. Greene followed for a time then turned his attention back towards South Carolina. Greene's forces now numbered approximately 1,500 continentals as the North Carolina and Virginia militias returned to their homes. British numbers in South Carolina were estimated to number 8,000, but these forces were spread out over the entire colony guarding forts and posts. Greene again leveraged his superior mission planning abilities by staying in contact with the partisan leaders of South Carolina; Pickens, Sumter and Marion. He requested that Sumter operate against Camden, that Pickens operate against Augusta, and Marion, with the support of Lee and his cavalry, disrupt the lines of communication between Ninety-Six, Camden and Charleston.<sup>95</sup>

After Cornwallis ventured north, Francis Lord Rawdon was left in command of South Carolina. He positioned himself at Camden with 1,500 troops. Partisan action was continuous throughout the state while Greene was operating to the North. As a result, Rawdon's communication with Cornwallis was completely cut off and he was unaware of the battle and aftermath of Guilford Court House. When he received word that Greene and his army was heading back to South Carolina with the intent of taking Camden, he was shocked.<sup>96</sup>

Lee was able to link up with Marion sometime during the middle of April. Once their forces were joined, their objective was Fort Watson; a post along the Santee River linking Camden and Charleston. The fort was well constructed with high outer defenses. However, Lee

and Marion were able to take the fort on 23 April. As a result of Fort Watson, Camden was now isolated.<sup>97</sup>

On 25 April, Greene's army met with Lord Rawdon at Hobkirk's Hill. Rawdon, and his 1,500 troops, knew they were the only force available to deal with Greene. Rawdon, in a bold move, seized the initiative and attacked Greene with close to 1,000 men. Rawdon displayed a high level of skill and won another tactical victory for the British, but gained nothing in the end. Greene, ever mindful of the overall strategy, withdrew before his army was defeated in detail. By the end of the battle, Greene lost 132 killed and 136 wounded while Rawdon lost over 250; over twenty five percent of his force.<sup>98</sup> Just like Cornwallis at Guilford Courthouse, Rawdon could not afford these losses. He did not have the resources to replace them.

With the rising tide of Whig support, Greene's ability to enlist militia increased. Rawdon recognized this, and sent evacuation orders to Ninety-Six, Augusta, and Fort Granby. Greene's patrols, however, intercepted each of the dispatches. Rawdon abandoned Camden on 10 May, 1781, and made his way towards Charleston. British posts fell at Orangeburg, Fort Motte, and Granby within the next week, and by 19 June, Augusta, Georgetown and Ninety-Six were in American hands as well. By July, the British were virtually cleared out of South Carolina. They only held a narrow strip of the low country from Charleston to Savannah.<sup>99</sup>

Meanwhile, Cornwallis made his way to Wilmington to rest and refit. While he was there, instead of continuing to prosecute North Carolina, which was now devoid of Continentals, he made the fateful decision to advance on Virginia. This decision not only violated Clinton's original orders, but resulted in the total abandonment of the Southern Strategy of rallying loyalist support to assist the British army. Cornwallis sent word to Clinton advising him of his intentions



and argued that Clinton should shift the British effort to Virginia. Clinton did have troops prepositioned in Virginia, but those troops were not intended to dominate the entire state. As long as the Carolinas were not under control, he only intended to have a base of operations along the coast. This coastal base was to serve in a limited capacity as a haven for loyalists and relieve some pressure off the operations in the Carolinas, as any large concentrations of troops around the Chesapeake would be vulnerable to the French Fleet. Cornwallis, however, was of his own mind. He proceeded north into Virginia, and sealed his fate. By October, Cornwallis surrendered to Washington at Yorktown.<sup>100</sup>

### *Conclusion*

There has been an ongoing debate of whether the British lost the Southern campaign or if the Americans won. This argument will go on without end. However, it is clear that the British failed in their initial planning assumptions. Their assumption that loyalists would be available to take over security responsibilities never materialized. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 5-1, Marine Corps Planning Process, tells us that “assumptions are suppositions about the current situation or about future facts...”<sup>101</sup> However, when an assumption cannot be validated it becomes a risk. The problem for the British was the information they used to validate their assumption. Germain, under increasing political pressure and with his reputation in jeopardy, wanted to believe the reports he received regarding loyalist support in the South. This desire to believe the reports led to a lack of critical thinking during the initial planning and design of the operation. Had Germain thought critically about the reports, he would have brought into

question the veracity of the reports and the actual reality on the ground. Instead, assumptions were erroneously validated and the operation was fundamentally flawed from the start. Also the ability of Whig and rebel forces to dissuade those loyalists that were available to join with the British outmatched the British ability to protect them. In fact, Pancake argues that the inability of the British to protect those loyalist who did remain loyal to the crown was even more disastrous than the over estimation of strength and numbers of loyalists.<sup>102</sup>

The next point to consider is the treatment of the population at the hands of the British. Chapter 1-150 of the United States Army Field Manual *Counterinsurgency* tells us that “using substantial force also increases the opportunity for insurgent propaganda to portray lethal military activities as brutal.”<sup>103</sup> Had the British, Tarleton especially, showed restraint and discipline when handling the population, two key players would have been eliminated from the equation; Sumter and Pickens. Both of these men were paroled and neutral until their plantations were burned and their families threatened. Imagine the reduction in the complexity of Cornwallis’s problem if the partisan leadership was reduced by two thirds in South Carolina. Also, the stories propagated by the rebels about the massacre at the Waxhaws were a powerful recruiting tool. It did nothing positive for the British effort.

The last point to consider is the logistical dilemma faced by Cornwallis. Clausewitz tells us that “When an army begins an operation, whether it is to attack the enemy and invade his theater of war or take up positions along its own borders, it necessarily remains dependent on its sources of supply and replenishment and must maintain communication with them. They constitute the basis of its existence and survival.”<sup>104</sup> Clausewitz further states that the needs of an army can be separated between those that the land can supply and those that can only come from home. Supplies from the land on which an army operates usually consist of provisions

while supplies from home usually consist of men and equipment.<sup>105</sup> Cornwallis was cut off from both sources. As Dederer points out, the British were “at the end of a 3,000 mile line of supply and reinforcement.” With the apparent failure of the “Americanization” plan, and the unpopularity of the war with the British people and Parliament, each British soldier lost was an asset Cornwallis could not replace.<sup>106</sup> Lastly, once Cornwallis burned his supplies and pursued Greene into North Carolina, he was at the mercy of the terrain, weather, and his adversary. When he left his supply lines far to the rear, and there was no ability to establish new ones, he assumed a risk that led to his retreat after Guilford Court House.

On the American side, the chances for defeat were numerous and the debacle at Camden should have been the end of things. The motivation and discipline of the troops was virtually non-existent and the only remaining fighters were uncoordinated bands of partisan fighters. Nathanael Greene’s ability to instill discipline in the ranks and coordinate the efforts of a conventional army with partisan fighters proved to be a deciding factor. There were previous examples of partisans being encouraged to operate within an area of operation, Greene however was the first to view the partisans as an essential component of his strategy.

In terms of mission planning abilities, Greene was ideally suited for command of the Southern Department. From his embarrassing defeat at Fort Mifflin, to his redemption at Trenton, Greene learned warfare through experience. His time as Quarter Master General developed his abilities in the art of logistical planning. This experience taught him the necessity of establishing supply magazines throughout his area of operation as well as planning for the mobility of his troops. Had Greene not taken the time and devoted the resources to reconnoiter the rivers and roads of North Carolina, his race to the Dan River would not have been successful and would have given the Cornwallis the ability to capture his army.

Lastly, Greene had a clear understanding of what his overall strategic goal was. He knew his goal wasn't to liberate the South; rather he understood the need to trade space for time. With French forces assembling in the colonies, the British were facing a worldwide conflict. The longer the Americans could protract the war in the colonies the more expensive and politically untenable it became for the British. As Mao would later describe it, Greene was conducting an active defense or an offensive defense in conjunction with a strategic retreat. Mao likened this to the difference between two boxers. A foolish boxer starts a match and attempts to overpower his opponent by sheer force. An experienced boxer however, parries blows and delivers small, quick strikes to tire his opponent. Only after the slugger is exhausted does the experienced boxer deliver decisive blows.<sup>107</sup> As much as he wanted to, Greene knew he couldn't overpower Cornwallis. Greene's strategy called for constant jabs at Cornwallis's supply lines, pulling the British along to the point of exhaustion, and avoiding decisive defeat in order to keep his army alive.

Greene had a unique ability to lead men and understand the problem at hand. Combine this with the foresight he demonstrated in prepositioning stores and boats, understanding his enemy and his own army, and you find a first rate general officer. Greene may have tactically lost every battle he fought, but he understood his center of gravity was his army. As long as his army survived, he could win: and he did. A warfighter, regardless of rank or specialty, can learn a valuable lesson in Greene's mission analysis and mission planning. His campaign shows the advantage gained when one adversary is thoroughly prepared with a clear understanding of the problem, and the opponent is not.

## *Notes*

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- <sup>1</sup> (Russell 2000) p 241
  - <sup>2</sup> (Higginbotham 1983) p 355
  - <sup>3</sup> (Russell 2000) p 114
  - <sup>4</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 206
  - <sup>5</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 213
  - <sup>6</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 16
  - <sup>7</sup> (Higginbotham 1983) p 357
  - <sup>8</sup> (Headquarters, United States Marine Corps 1997)
  - <sup>9</sup> (Edgar 2001) p 52
  - <sup>10</sup> (Edgar 2001) p 53
  - <sup>11</sup> (Gordon 2003) p 61
  - <sup>12</sup> (Higginbotham 1983) p 353
  - <sup>13</sup> (Russell 2000) p 148
  - <sup>14</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 80
  - <sup>15</sup> (Pancake 1985) p 70
  - <sup>16</sup> (Morrill 1993)
  - <sup>17</sup> (Edgar 2001)
  - <sup>18</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 75
  - <sup>19</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 1036
  - <sup>20</sup> (Shy 1990) p 209
  - <sup>21</sup> (Russell 2000) p 151
  - <sup>22</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 1173
  - <sup>23</sup> (Russell 2000) p 150
  - <sup>24</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 80
  - <sup>25</sup> (Higginbotham 1983) p 359
  - <sup>26</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 23
  - <sup>27</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 25
  - <sup>28</sup> (Russell 2000)
  - <sup>29</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 90
  - <sup>30</sup> (Russell 2000) p 167
  - <sup>31</sup> (Russell 2000) p 169
  - <sup>32</sup> (Gordon 2003) p 94
  - <sup>33</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 94
  - <sup>34</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 95
  - <sup>35</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 169
  - <sup>36</sup> (Russell 2000) p 173
  - <sup>37</sup> (Lumpkin 1981) p 66
  - <sup>38</sup> (Headquarters, US Army 2006)
  - <sup>39</sup> (Pancake 1985) p 92
  - <sup>40</sup> (Edgar 2001) p 60
  - <sup>41</sup> (Edgar 2001) p 61
  - <sup>42</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 40
  - <sup>43</sup> (Lumpkin 1981) p 85
  - <sup>44</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 161
  - <sup>45</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 677
  - <sup>46</sup> (Gordon 2003) p 105
  - <sup>47</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 44
  - <sup>48</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 756
  - <sup>49</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 49
  - <sup>50</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 577
  - <sup>51</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 578
  - <sup>52</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 49
  - <sup>53</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 581

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<sup>54</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 582  
<sup>55</sup> (Gordon 2003) p 117  
<sup>56</sup> (Headquarters, United States Marine Corps 1997)  
<sup>57</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 455  
<sup>58</sup> (Russell 2000) p 200  
<sup>59</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 116  
<sup>60</sup> (Russell 2000) p 201  
<sup>61</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 118  
<sup>62</sup> (Russell 2000) p 202  
<sup>63</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 119  
<sup>64</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 736  
<sup>65</sup> (Russell 2000) p 203  
<sup>66</sup> (Russell 2000) pgs 204, 206  
<sup>67</sup> (Gordon 2003) p 128  
<sup>68</sup> (Gordon 2003) p 126  
<sup>69</sup> (Higginbotham 1983) p 365  
<sup>70</sup> (Lumpkin 1981) p 120  
<sup>71</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 76  
<sup>72</sup> (Gordon 2003) p 126  
<sup>73</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 123  
<sup>74</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 1020  
<sup>75</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 88  
<sup>76</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 292  
<sup>77</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 296  
<sup>78</sup> (Gordon 2003) p 134  
<sup>79</sup> (Lumpkin 1981) p 132  
<sup>80</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 109  
<sup>81</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 298  
<sup>82</sup> (Lumpkin 1981) p 134  
<sup>83</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 113-115  
<sup>84</sup> (Treacy 1963) p 128  
<sup>85</sup> (Russell 2000) pgs 216-222  
<sup>86</sup> (Russell 2000) p 223  
<sup>87</sup> (Russell 2000) p 223  
<sup>88</sup> (Russell 2000) p 223  
<sup>89</sup> (Morrill 1993) p 145  
<sup>90</sup> (Lumpkin 1981) p 168  
<sup>91</sup> (University n.d.)  
<sup>92</sup> (Lumpkin 1981) p 169  
<sup>93</sup> (Russell 2000) p 228  
<sup>94</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 470  
<sup>95</sup> (Higginbotham 1983) p 372  
<sup>96</sup> (Lumpkin 1981) p 177  
<sup>97</sup> (Gordon 2003) p 148  
<sup>98</sup> (Boatner 1966) p 508  
<sup>99</sup> (Gordon 2003) ch 7  
<sup>100</sup> (Higginbotham 1983) p 376  
<sup>101</sup> (Headquarters, United States Marine Corps 2010) ch 1-5  
<sup>102</sup> (Pancake 1985) p 243  
<sup>103</sup> (Headquarters, US Army 2006) ch 1-150  
<sup>104</sup> (Von Clausewitz 1976) p 341  
<sup>105</sup> (Von Clausewitz 1976) p 341  
<sup>106</sup> (Dederer 1983) p 48  
<sup>107</sup> (Tse-Tung 1967) p 103, 109

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